

right: Roy Lichtenstein, *Look Mickey*, 1961, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Roy and Dorothy Lichtenstein in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art. © Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington

"This was the first time I decided to make a painting really look like commercial art. The approach turned out to be so interesting that eventually it became impossible to do any other kind of painting." Roy Lichtenstein

Lichtenstein kept this painting, one with personal significance, in his possession until he and his wife gave it to the National Gallery in 1990.

below: Roy Lichtenstein (detail)
© Christopher Felver/Corbis



1 Pop!

In the 1950s and 1960s, young British and American artists made popular culture their subject matter. By incorporating logos, brand names, television and cartoon characters, and other consumer products into their work, these artists blurred the boundaries between art and everyday life.

Roy Lichtenstein was one of the originators of this new pop movement. Fascinated by printed mass media, particularly newspaper advertising and cartoon or comic book illustration, Lichtenstein developed a style characterized by bold lines, bright colors, dot patterns, and sometimes words.

"The art of today is all around us."

Roy Lichtenstein



2 Roy

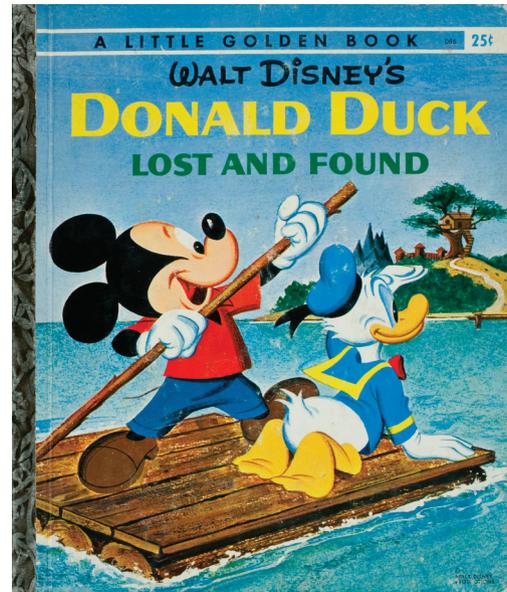
Born and raised in New York City, Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997) began to draw and paint when he was a teenager. During this time he also developed a passion for jazz and science, and he enjoyed visiting museums. He went to Ohio State University to study fine arts, but his college years were interrupted when he was drafted into the army and sent to Europe during World War II. After returning to Ohio State and completing his studies, Lichtenstein worked as a graphic designer and taught art at several universities. In the 1960s he quickly emerged as a leading practitioner of pop art. This success allowed him to dedicate himself full-time to making art.

3 A Big One

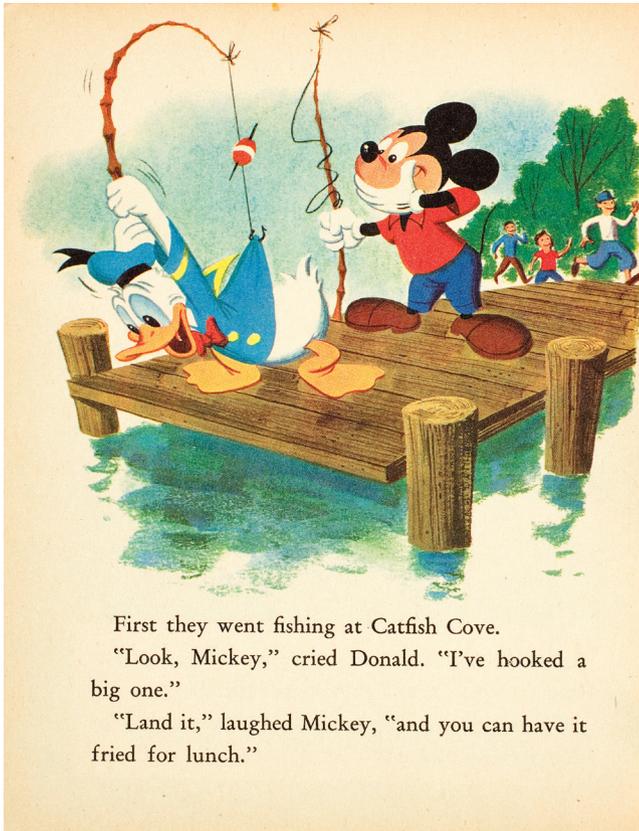
Lichtenstein's breakthrough came in 1961 when he painted *Look Mickey*. It is one of his earliest paintings to use the visual language of comic strips. The idea for the painting came from a scene in the 1960 children's book *Donald Duck: Lost and Found*, a copy of which probably belonged to the artist's sons.

Lichtenstein used the design conventions of the comic strip: its speech bubble, flat primary colors, and ink-dot patterns that mimic commercial printing. These Benday dots became Lichtenstein's trademark. Invented by Benjamin Day in 1879, the dots were used in comic strips and newspapers as an inexpensive way to print shades and color tints. Look at Donald's eyes and Mickey's face: Lichtenstein made those dots by dipping a dog-grooming brush into paint and then pressing it on the canvas! He later used stencils to help him paint dots.

**"It's a matter of re-seeing it in your own way."
Roy Lichtenstein**



4 Look!



First they went fishing at Catfish Cove.
"Look, Mickey," cried Donald. "I've hooked a big one."
"Land it," laughed Mickey, "and you can have it fried for lunch."

Cover and illustration by Bob Grant and Bob Totten from Carl Buettner, *Donald Duck: Lost and Found*, 1960. © 1960 Disney

Lichtenstein often enlarged, simplified, and reworked images he found. He never copied the source.

Compare the storybook illustration with Lichtenstein's painting. What parts are similar? What differences can you find?

Examine the changes the artist made

He simplified the background by removing three people

He rotated the direction of the dock

He added the word bubble, which makes the text a part of the picture

He translated the illustration into an image in primary colors, using red, blue, and yellow on a white background

By making paintings that look like enlarged comic strips, Lichtenstein surprised and shocked many viewers. Why? He made people think about where images come from and how they are made.

try this

Moving Toward Abstraction

In his *Bull* series of 1973, Lichtenstein explored the progression of an image from representation to abstraction. Beginning with a recognizable drawing of a bull, Lichtenstein simplified, exaggerated, and rearranged the colors, lines, and/or shapes until the animal was almost unrecognizable. This series reveals the “steps” of the artistic process: the body of the bull is reduced to geometric shapes of triangles and squares, the blue areas refer to the bull’s hide, and curved lines suggest the horns and tail.

Study the images

How are the pictures similar? How are they different?

Which one do you find most intriguing? Why?

Would you know the last one is a picture of a bull if you didn’t see it in this series?

Create a series of your own

Start with a photograph of a place, person, or object. You can take the photo yourself, or cut one out of a magazine or newspaper.

Then, create a series of two, three, or more drawings. Make each one more abstract by simplifying the shapes, colors, and lines. Reduce them each time until you can no longer recognize your subject.

Bull I, no. 116



Bull II, no. 117



Bull III, no. 118



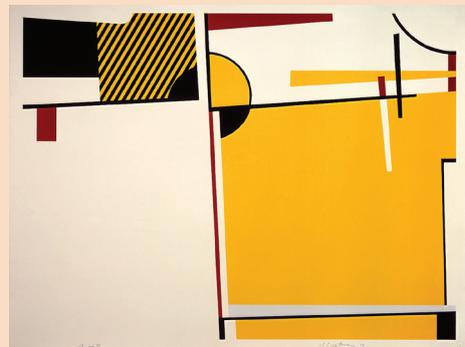
Bull IV, no. 119



Bull V, no. 120



Bull VI, no. 121



Roy Lichtenstein, 1973, National Gallery of Art, Gift of Gemini G.E.L. and the Artist